

## Mental Programs and Social Behavior Patterns in Russian Society

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of the article is to reconstruct the mental programs, their cognitive, axiological and connotative structures, and construction on this basis of various modal patterns of social behavior in Russian society. Methodology of the article is based on an interdisciplinary scientific approach making it possible to conceptually disclose the contents of reflexive structures of mental programs that determine modal patterns of social behavior. On the basis of the cognitive construction the authors identify the distinctive features of the liberal pattern, liberal-statist pattern, statist pattern and conservative-liberal pattern of social behavior in Russian society. It is shown that in modern Russian society, two alternative modal patterns of social behavior can be distinguished: liberal and conservative. However, in real life these patterns are mostly hybrid: statist-liberal, as they include elements of the liberal behavior pattern.

### KEYWORDS

mental program, social behavior, social behavior  
modal pattern, liberal social behavior pattern,  
conservative social behavior pattern, liberal-statist  
social behavior pattern, statist-liberal social behavior  
pattern

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 July 2016  
Revised 13 September 2016  
Accepted 27 September 2016

### 1. Introduction

We can distinguish in modern Russian society different patterns of social behavior, following which people being into the same social situation react differently, demonstrating unique repertoires of social actions. These patterns were formed in the context of both the modernization transformation of Russian society and the regeneration of state-centric matrix of its development. Their formation has also been greatly influenced by changes in the mass consciousness of Russians, many of whom, having experienced in the early 1990s an euphoria from "breath-taking" liberal modernization projects, now complain not only about the results of reforms in Russia, but about their objectives (Gorshkov et al., 2011). Scientific modeling of social behavior reveals its features typical for different social groups, as well as makes it possible to better understand the social and communicative practices in contemporary Russian society.

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## 2. Literature review

Various aspects of social behavior in Russian society are already the subject of research practices. Special attention of researchers is paid to issues such as the values of a modern Russian society that define the actions of various social groups (Khaliu, 2015), the values and ideological principles that guide people in their relations with society and the state (Toshchenko, 2016), the Russians' practices of adaptation to rapidly changing social conditions (Kozyreva et al., 2013), the specifics of economic and political behavior in Russia (Gorshkov, 2016; Toshchenko, 2014; Andreenkova, 2010a; 2010b).

A special work devoted to Russian society "as it is" examined the status and dynamics of the mass consciousness, motivations and behavioral practices of Russian people in conditions of a comprehensive transformation processes. Making a social diagnosis of the modern Russian society, the author notes that at present time the Russians are generally focused on modern forms of economic life and are more motivated by social, economic and technological innovation than the population of several other European countries. Speaking of the history of Russian reforms of the last two and a half decades in terms of the dynamics of the mass consciousness and the transformation of mass behavior patterns, the author distinguishes two periods: "the 90s of the last century is a time of fascination of Russians with Western experience, accompanied by persistent attempts to transfer to the Russian environment of different foreign samples and models. At that time, as noted by the author, the appropriateness of the Russian specificity was often placed in question, if not rejected as being retrograde. In response to the one-sidedness of these interests, there was a conservative wave starting formed from the late 1990s, which largely determined the state of mass mentality of Russians at the turn of centuries. The main dominant idea of this wave was the return from western-inspired aspirations of democracy formation period to the "native Russian" ideas, moral principles and mode of life" (Gorshkov, 2016).

At the same time, a review of the scientific literature suggests that in order to understand the specifics of the social behavior of different social groups in Russia it is necessary to identify patterns of their social behavior determined by different mental programs. In this regard, the purpose of the article is to reconstruct the mental programs, their cognitive, axiological and connotative structures and construction on this basis of various modal patterns of social behavior in Russian society.

## 3. Methodology

In the modern social-humanitarian knowledge, the social behavior is understood as typical for human form of interaction with the surrounding social environment, mediated by its external structure and organization, as well as by the phenomena of the human mind. However, in the specific research practices, there are different opinions about the factors of social behavior determined by their disciplinary and methodological specifics. Some researchers understand these factors as the psychological characteristics of individuals, their beliefs and needs, as well as the environment (O'Brien, 2014); others claim them to be cognitive processes, social conditions and their changes (Hendricks and Hatch,

2006). Some researchers considered culture as the main factor (Triandis and Eunkook, 2002).

In this regard, we can distinguish two alternative approaches to the explanation of social behavior: personal and situational (Hekhausen, 2001; Heckhausen and Heckhausen). Proponents of the first approach point out that social behavior is determined primarily by individual traits of human nature. Supporters of the second one believe that social behavior is determined first of all by the social situation in which the person is. Secondly, social behavior is influenced by his subjective interpretation of the social situation, which is neither a mirror reflection of it, nor the product of an arbitrary "construction of reality", as it represents the result of the interaction between the person and the situation (Ross and Nisbett, 1991; Grishina, 2010; Grishina, 2016). The scientific literature also represents the idea that social behavior is based on both internal and external regulators. In this regard, the study of the regulators of social behavior is dominated by two approaches: dispositional and cultural. Dispositional approach focuses on the study of the internal regulators of social behavior, i.e. mindsets, attitudes and values of the person (Yadov, 2013; Chaiklin, 2011; Trafimow et al., 2004; Armitage and Christian, 2003). In terms of the cultural approach the focus is on the study of external regulators of social behavior: cultural traditions and social norms of behavior, functioning in the past, and helping to choose the instrumental forms of behavior in the present. Cultural traditions and social norms, internalized by the individual, constitute his subjective culture, influencing the ways and the results of the interpretation of the social situation and the choice of patterns of social behavior (Triandis, 1994; Pavlenko, 2010). Currently, in the study of social behavior, there is tendency of overcoming the cognitive one-sidedness of personality and situational approach, dispositional and cultural ones. In line with this trend, the social behavior of a person is not regarded as the result of influence of the social situation or his individual traits, social values, attitudes and cultural predispositions. The social behavior of a person is seen primarily as a result of his interpretation of the social situation and attributing to it the values and meanings in a particular socio-cultural context.

Interpretation of the social situation and corresponding social behavior as a reaction of a social actor to the social situation and the external social changes in the form of a set of social actions aimed at maintaining social existence or adaptation to the social environment, are carried out on the basis of the mental program formed during the process of social communication. The idea that the social behavior of actors depends on their mental programs, the formation of which is based on the culture and social environment, belongs to G. Hofstede, who considered these programs as examples of "thinking, feeling and action" (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, 2011). The concept of mental programs proposed by G. Hofstede is a quite effective methodological tool of cross-cultural research. However, for the understanding of mental programs that determine characteristics of the social behavior of individuals forming various social groups, it is necessary to identify first of all the specifics of these programs and their structures.

Within the context of a multi-dimensional methodological construct of interdisciplinary research, in mental programs of social behavior we can distinguish cognitive, axiological and connotative structures. These structures are both reflexive and non-reflexive: cognitive structures include reflexive ideas



and non-reflexive images, stereotypes or dogmas; axiological structures include reflexive and non-reflexive values such as "preferences-opinions" and "preferences-beliefs"; connotative structures comprise mindsets as reflexive readiness and non-reflexive propensity. Non-reflexive structures of mental programs are sustainable, as they are not recognized by the people as the basis of their social behavior. Reflective structures of mental programs, on the contrary, are unstable because they are understood by people, and therefore become susceptible to external and internal influences, becoming diversified. Mental programs of social behavior are binary, showing a mismatch between reflexive and non-reflexive structures. In these programs, depending on the social situation, sometimes reflexive structures, sometimes non-reflexive ones are activated, which affects the actors' interpretation of the situation and their social behavior, which, respectively, can be both conscious and unconscious. Social behavior as a set of unconscious actions can be of traditional or normative (which depends on common values and norms) type (Parsons, 1949). Social behavior as a set of conscious actions can be of target-rational or value-rational types (Weber, 1951). Due to mental programs, people falling into the same social situation design different patterns of social reality. And if people define the situation as real, then, as noted by W. Thomas, it becomes real in its consequences (Thomas and Thomas, 1928), which are directly manifested in the various repertoires of social actions.

In modern science, social behavior patterns are sometimes seen as short behavioral scenarios (Pavlenko, 2010), or samples of social actions. The researchers point out that the patterns of social behavior are simplified images of reality, which are not requested to reflect the reality in its entirety (Shilkina, 2012). In this regard, the pattern of social behavior is a cognitive analogue of practices of social behavior as a response reaction of the person to the social situation in the form of certain social actions determined by non-reflexive structures and reflective structures of mental program. And the non-reflexive structures of mental program determine normative pattern of social behavior, which depends on common cultural values and norms, and reflective structures determine modal patterns of social behavior, which are statistically the most common in society.

#### 4. Results

Formation of modal patterns of social behavior took place in the context of the changes that captured Russian society at the turn of 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries, and the results of which were experienced by everybody for two and a half decades. At the beginning of the 1990s, Russian reformers initiated the modernization of Russia in a liberal direction. As a result, in Russian society the number of supporters of the liberal pattern of social behavior has begun to increase. In the mid-90s, the number of Russians focused on personal achievement, well-being and individual independence has increased approximately up to 50-60% (Trompenaars, 1996; Latova). Soon, however, as noted by the researchers, the supporters of reforms turned out to be in the minority, because, according to the Russian people, these reforms have led to a deterioration of the situation in all spheres of life of Russian society. However, a certain part of Russians saw also the "advantages" in the reforms, associated with democratization, freedom of speech and human rights.

In 2000s, as noted by the researchers, there was a gradual Russians' rethinking of reform achievements and failures, including those at a personal level. The achievements related to the formation in Russia of a "consumer society" (market saturation and termination of the deficit economy, a certain growth in prosperity, non-restricted earning, freedom to travel abroad) have begun to be placed in the forefront. At the same time, there is a decrease in importance of acquired in the early 90s democratic rights and freedoms in the minds of Russians. In personal terms, the reforms, on the one hand, have opened new opportunities for self-realization, professional and career development, entrepreneurship, as well as for participation in social and political life. However, on the other hand, according to most of the respondents, there is only limited number of people who could use freely these possibilities, while for many Russians they became hard to use, or even reduced. Speaking on the Russians' assessment of their life, it should be noted that for the last ten years the number of those who are satisfied has increased: in 2013, 29% of respondents thought that their life was in general "good" (in 2003 - 20%), 62 % found their life "satisfactory" (in 2003 - 67%) and 9% assessed it as "bad" (in 2003 - 13%). The assessment by the Russians of their general everyday social and psychological condition is also positive: 52% of them are in a state of emotional rest, 6% are experiencing emotional lift, 11% are indifferent and apathetic, 31% are feeling negative emotions (15% are anxious about a trouble brewing up, 13% are irritated, 3% feel anger and aggression). The emotional and psychological state of the Russians is also shown by the fact that 81% of respondents felt the support of friends and colleagues, being sure that they would come to help in case of need (37% experienced it frequently, 44% - sometimes). However, 79% of Russians feel the injustice of what is happening around (32% experienced this feeling often, 47% - sometimes), 73% of Russians feel themselves powerless in terms of their influence on current events (25% - often, 47% - sometimes), 61 % feel that it is impossible to live like this (18% - often, 43% - sometimes) (Gorshkov, 2016).

In addition, it should be noted that the majority of Russians has laid a course for a "decent" poverty, i.e. when people are not starving, but they are able to supply only their current needs, and in this sense are fully dependent on the state. On this basis, the ideas of statism and paternalism are cultivated, and according to the researchers, this "denies people the possibility of freely choose the goods and services, and limits to a greater extent the unconstrained behavior of Russians making people dependent and inactive" (Novaya Gazeta, 2016).

Two alternative modal patterns of social behavior can be distinguished in modern Russian society: liberal and conservative. However, these patterns are not widely known in their pure form, they are mainly hybrid in real life. This is due to the fact that the reflective structure of mental programs of modal patterns of social behavior are constantly subject to diversification, so social behavior, referring in general to the liberal pattern, may contain elements of a conservative one and vice versa.

Currently, only a small number of Russians support the liberal pattern of social behavior in pure form, in the mental program of which the basic values are private property and the market economy, rule of law and freedom as a possibility for individual choice (see Table 1). The prevalence of this pattern of social behavior in a modern society is shown by the following sociological research results: only 2% of respondents believe that all large enterprises should



be in private hands (Levada Center, 2016b); 13% of Russians believe that people need to be proactive and take care of themselves, and 9% say that strong income inequality is useful because people can see opportunities for improvement, and work better (Levada Center, 2015b); 13% believe that Russia needs the same democracy as in developed countries in Europe and America (Levada Center, 2015a); 12% of Russians read the Constitution and pretty well remember their content (Dobrynina, 2014); about 10% of Russians are ready to take part in the political or economic protests (Levada Center, 2015c).

Currently, there are much more supporters of a hybrid (i.e. the liberal-statist) pattern of social behavior in Russian society. Thus, 26% of Russians opt for the development of market economy and the strengthening of private property, 29% believe that it is not necessary to raise the question of the return to the state of the property privatized in the 1990s; 35% prefer to have their "own business" (Levada Center, 2016b); 44% believe that the activities of Russian businessmen and entrepreneurs are beneficial to Russia (Levada Center, 2014c); 62% of Russians believe that the welfare of the people can be provided by reliable and valid laws; 29% believe that in Russia today it is more important to focus on the respect of human rights, rather than to be preoccupied by the disorder in the country; 49% are willing to refuse from political freedoms in no circumstances (Levada Center, 2014b), 42% of Russians are not ready to refuse from the freedom of speech and the right to freely travel abroad, if the state guarantee them a decent wage and a decent pension; 37% are interested in politics; 30% believe that they may influence the authorities regarding the taking of certain decisions; 22% believe that they are influencing the political and economic life of Russia (Levada Center, 2015a).

Thus, the results of sociological studies show that today a small number of Russians adhere to the liberal pattern of social behavior. In practice, this pattern is hybrid, i.e. liberal-statist, because it includes elements of the conservative behavior pattern. Within the mental program of liberal-statist pattern of social behavior, the development of Russia is associated with the strengthening of state power as the main lever of economic liberalization and the integration of society from top to bottom on a sustainable basis, and its future is associated with a strong rule of law, ensuring the principles of personal freedom. Currently, supporters of the liberal-statist pattern of social behavior are about 25% in the economy, 10% - in the social sector, 25% - in politics, 30% - in legal sector (see Table 1).

In the mental program of conservative pattern of social behavior, the basic values are the state property and the state, which should take care of people. In pure form, this pattern of social behavior is also supported by a small portion of Russian society (see Table 1). For example, only 16% of Russians opt for the state ownership of the means of production and the state system of social benefits distribution (Levada Center, 2011); another 16% believe that the state should provide social protection of the population in conditions of market economy and private ownership of the means of production; 19% believe that the majority of Russians are be able to live without the tutelage of the state, and the state should provide assistance only to those who are not able to take care of themselves; 5% believe that the democratic form of government is not for Russia (Levada Center, 2015b).

In practice, the conservative pattern of economic behavior in the Russian society is also hybrid: statist-liberal, as it includes elements of the liberal

pattern of behavior. Thus, only 45% of Russians believe that all large enterprises should be state-owned; 42% say that all property privatized in the 90s must be returned to the State; 33% believe that it is necessary to return to the state only the property that was privatized illegally; 57% tolerate the private ownership of land, but under state control (Levada Center, 2011); 35% assess the activities of Russian businessmen and entrepreneurs as negative because it brings harm to Russia (Levada Center, 2013).

In the vocational field and employment one, the supporters of the statist-liberal pattern of social behavior prefer to be employees and receive a stable salary (48%), 22% want to get paid and not be going to work; 66% of Russians believe that the work is not only an issue of money, but also a possibility for self-realization, communication with people (Levada Center, 2015d). In the social sector, 74% of respondents believe that the majority of Russians cannot live without the tutelage of the state, and therefore the state should be more concerned about people and ensure a normal level of well-being of all citizens (Levada Center, 2014a).

In the political sphere, the majority of Russians support the existing state power (84%); 58% believe that Russia needs a "strong hand", which will put the country in order, 67% believe that Russia should be a great power, with powerful armed forces, and influencing all political processes in the world (Gorshkov and Petukhov, 2015).

The statist-liberal pattern of social behavior has been manifested in the clearest way in connection with the Crimea's admission to the Russian Federation. Thus, in 2016, the proportion of Russians who believe that the Crimea is a part of Russia is 87%, 57% explain their position by saying that "Crimea has always been Russian", 20% refer to the referendum held in the spring of 2014 about the Peninsula's admission to Russia. 90% of respondents do not agree with the opinion that Russia having annexing Crimea violated international agreements and international law. 52% of respondents noted that the phrase "Crimea belongs to us" is for them a symbol of celebration and pride of the fact that the Crimea has been returned back to Russia, another 16% called it "a symbol of the revival of Russia" (Levada Center, 2016a).

Supporters of the statist-liberal pattern of social behavior believe that Russia needs democracy, but a special one, corresponding to national traditions and specifics (55%) or such as it was in the Soviet Union (16%); 7% follow authoritarian ideas, believing that all power in the country should be in the hands of a strong political leader (Levada Center, 2015a). 60% of Russians are not interested in politics at all, 85% are not willing to participate in protest meetings and demonstrations (Levada Center, 2015c).

Mental programs of supporters of the statist-liberal pattern of social behavior include elements of statist legal consciousness, according to which the state is placed above the law and has the right to adopt nonlegal laws. 55% of respondents believe that it is more important for Russia now to put the country in order, rather than protect human rights. 43% are ready to refuse from the freedom of speech and the right to freely travel abroad, if the state guarantees a normal wage and decent pensions (SLON, 2015).

So, at present, most of Russians follow the statist-liberal pattern of social behavior. Those in the economic sphere are about 60%; in the social one - 60%; in politics - 60%; in legal sector - 50% (see Table 1).



**Table 1.** Modal patterns of social behavior in Russian society

Modal patterns of social behavior	Areas of life			
	Economic	Social	Political	Legal
Liberal	2 %	10%	10%	10%
Liberal-statist	25%	10%	25%	30%
Conservative	13 %	20%	5 %	10%
Statist-liberal	60%	60%	60%	50%

## Conclusions

Social behavior is a reaction of social actors to a social situation in the form of certain conscious and unconscious actions aimed at adaptation to the social environment. These actions are the result of cognitive interpretations of a particular social situation, made by social actors on the basis of mental programs, in which we can identify the cognitive structure, axiological structure and connotative structure, being reflexive and non-reflexive. Unstable reflexive structures of mental programs determine the modal pattern of social behavior.

In modern Russian society, two alternative modal patterns of social behavior can be distinguished: liberal and conservative. However, these patterns are not widely known in their pure form, they are mainly hybrid in real life.

Currently, only a small number of Russians support the liberal pattern of social behavior in pure form, in the mental program of which the basic values are private property and the market economy, rule of law and freedom as a possibility for individual choice. There are much more supporters of the hybrid (liberal-statist) social behavior pattern in Russian society. Within the mental program of this social behavior pattern, the development of Russia is associated with the strengthening of state power as the main lever of economic liberalization and the integration of society from top to bottom on a sustainable basis, and its future is associated with a strong rule of law, ensuring the principles of personal freedom. Proponents of this social behavior pattern, on the one hand, give priority to a market economy, law, and respect of human rights, and on the other hand, they are ready to refuse from the freedom of speech, if the state guarantee them a normal wage and decent pensions, and they find that they cannot have any impact on the political and economic life of Russia. Liberal statist pattern of social behavior is followed by about a quarter of Russians.

In the mental program of conservative pattern of social behavior, the basic values are the state property and the state, which should take care of people. In pure form, this pattern of social behavior is also supported by a small portion of Russian society. In practice, the conservative pattern of economic behavior in the Russian society is also hybrid: statist-liberal, as it includes elements of the liberal pattern of behavior. The followers of this pattern, on the one hand, support the existing state power and believe that the country needs a "strong hand" capable to put the society in order and believe that Russia should be a great power. On the other hand, they believe that Russia needs democracy, not

all large enterprises in the country should be state-owned, and the activity of entrepreneurs is beneficial for the society. Statist-liberal pattern of social behavior is followed by more than half of Russians.

### Acknowledgements

This research was financially supported by the grant from the Russian Science Foundation № 16-18-10387 "Mental programs and social behavior patterns in Russian society".

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### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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